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hISTORY OF MIDWAY

by Dawn Backlin

A visit to Midway City is very much like taking a trip to a Swiss village nestled in the heart of the Alps - a quality which has made Midway one of the most popular destinations of those seeking the laid back lifestyle of mountain living. A rapidly growing bedroom and resort community just west of Heber City in Wasatch County, Utah, Midway's existence is the result of a turbulent past and remains a living monument to an important part of the area's cultural heritage.

Much different from the city of today, Midway originally came into existence as a combined fortress for early pioneers seeking refuge from possible conflicts with area natives. Hailing, for the most part, from the Provo and American Fork areas of Utah County, the pioneers who called the western part of the Heber Valley home during the mid 1800's settled in two distinct communities located along Snake Creek.

Drawn by the natural hot springs and fertile land, the two small settlements which formed during the winter of 1859,

soon grew and established individual identities. What were known as the Upper and Lower Snake Creek settlements - located to the north-west of what is now Midway City

became home to 50 families by the

summer of 1861. Although the two communities remained separate, they did work together to construct the area's first community meeting place in 1862, located in the upper settlement, known as Mound City. The lower settlement was also designated as the area's first school, or "teacher's" district.

Over the following years the pioneers

worked to clear the area, constructing irrigation ditches, roads and bridges, while struggling to carve out their place

in the valley. As was true with many of the early settlers making their way across the



country, growing tensions with the Native Americans who had originally occupied the open land became a potential threat to the settlers. By 1866, the inhabitants of the two communities felt threatened by the Native Americans who saw the Snake Creek area as their own hunting and trapping territory and plans were made to abandon the communities altogether.

The decision was made by settlement leaders not to flee the area they had come to call home, but instead to band together seeking strength in numbers and construct a communal fortress for the protection of all of the area's inhabitants. That way they would not give up what they saw as their rights as land owners. Since neither settlement wanted to give up its own piece of the valley, a compromise was reached to construct a fort "midway" between the two settlements, in the location which is now known as Midway City.

An area for the town square was selected and mapped out. City blocks were then laid out around the perimeter. The construction of 75 side-by-side log cabins created a wall around the new community which was completely self contained, as the inhabitants were forced to adjust to a confined lifestyle which was run much like a military institution.

The fort was never attacked and a peace was signed with the local Native Americans after "The Black Hawk War" in 1866 removed any potential danger and assured the settler's continuing safety. Instead

History of Midway continued on page

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HISTORY OF MIDWAY cont'd

returning to the original upper and lower Snake Creek settlements following the resolution of the threats, the inhabitants instead gradually laid claim to the lands around the fortress area, which today makes up the core of the city of Midway.

As the community continued to grow, the influence felt by the settlers who had immigrated to the valley from parts of Switzerland began to shape the cultural look and feel of Midway, creating the Swiss flavor the city holds today.

In celebration of the unique Swiss flair which remains at Midway's core, an annual fall celebration, known as Swiss Days, has become the city's trademark and draws artisans, entertainers and spectators from all over the country. The crowning of a representative of the celebration - Swiss Miss - has grown in to a full fledged pageantry event over the years. The Boosters Club, Midway Historical Society and Garden Club - all long standing Midway organizations, continue to work together to assure that the city - despite a recent onslaught of growth and development seen in the area, remains Utah's very own unique slice of Swiss Paradise. △



Pictured above is "Matty," Zermatt Resort's bear mascot. Matty will be joined by other members of his "beary" special family when the resort opens in the spring of 2000.

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